



**Neven Maguire**

# For Neven, food is heaven

AWARD-WINNING chef **Neven Maguire** is well-known for taking very little time away from his restaurant, Mac-Nean's in Blacklion, Co Cavan, but every January he winds down, heading off with wife Amelda for a holiday in Thailand or Malaysia.

Thai food is his favourite, says the 35-year-old, who sits on the advisory board of safefood, the cross border Food Safety Promotion Board. "Thai food is so healthy and pure and a lot of it is quite easy to make."

Married two years now, Neven says he only has to look at food and he puts on weight. His advice to anybody thinking of food-related new year resolutions is to eat more often as a family. "If you eat as a family, it becomes a wonderful occasion. I greatly admire the French and Italians, where food isn't just about food — it's a feelgood factor."

Neven's new TV series, Neven's Food From The Sun, airs on RTE in February.

**What shape are you in?**

I feel good. I can definitely do with going to the gym — I try to go three times a week. I love exercise and if I didn't do it I'd end up like a Teletubby. I go running twice a week with a good friend. I hate running on my own.

**Do you have any health concerns?**

Thankfully not — I don't get flu much. A sore throat is about as much as I'd get. A few years ago, I had a couple of kidney stones — that was really painful.

**What are your healthiest eating habits?**

That's where I fall down. I always insist on my staff eating well but I could go half the day without eating. In front of me now is a mug of soup. Tea could be anything from bangers and mash to shepherd's pie — something tasty with vegetables and potato. I always have something to eat late at night. For me, breakfast is one of the most important meals — tea, yoghurt and Weetabix.

**What's your guiltiest pleasure?**

Desserts — I have an awful sweet tooth.

**What would keep you awake at night?**

It's very rare that I'm not able to sleep. I could drink a cup of coffee and sleep straightaway. I don't need much. Last night, for example, I went to sleep at 2.30am and was

up again at 8am. When I'm changing my menu, I'm thinking so much about food and getting so excited about it — that would keep me awake.

**How do you relax?**

I love spending time with Amelda. I find very relaxing to go for a walk with her or to cook for her in our house. My new year resolution is to spend as much time as possible with her and to cook more at home.

**What would you change about your appearance?**

I'd love to lose a stone in weight. Overall, I'm content with myself.

**What's your most cherished possession?**

My mobile phone — I use it so much.

**What scares you?**

Ill-health in my family. So many people are touched by cancer.

**Who would you invite to your dream dinner party?**

Del Boy from Only Fools And Horses — he'd be such fun. And Basil Fawty — he'd be a kitchen nightmare. Someone I really admire and have a lot of respect for is Mary McAleese. She's a real foodie. And Marian Finucane — she's entertaining and good fun. I'd cook for them all.

**Do you pray?**

I go to Mass once a month. It's very much a tradition in our family that we all go together on Christmas Eve. I got my sense of faith from my parents.

If you have faith, you respect people more. I pray in thanks for how I've succeeded. I never take anything for granted.

**What's your favourite smell?**

Fresh vanilla pods.

**What's your earliest memory?**

Christmas time with my family. I come from a family of nine and my father used to bring us all down to the sitting room. He'd knock three times and say 'is Santa there?' Then he'd say 'oh, he didn't come at all' and we'd all be disappointed. Then we'd see the crumbs on the plate and the empty glass.

**What would make a positive difference to your day?**

Just meeting nice people — manners cost nothing.

Helen O'Callaghan



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